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28 February 1966

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

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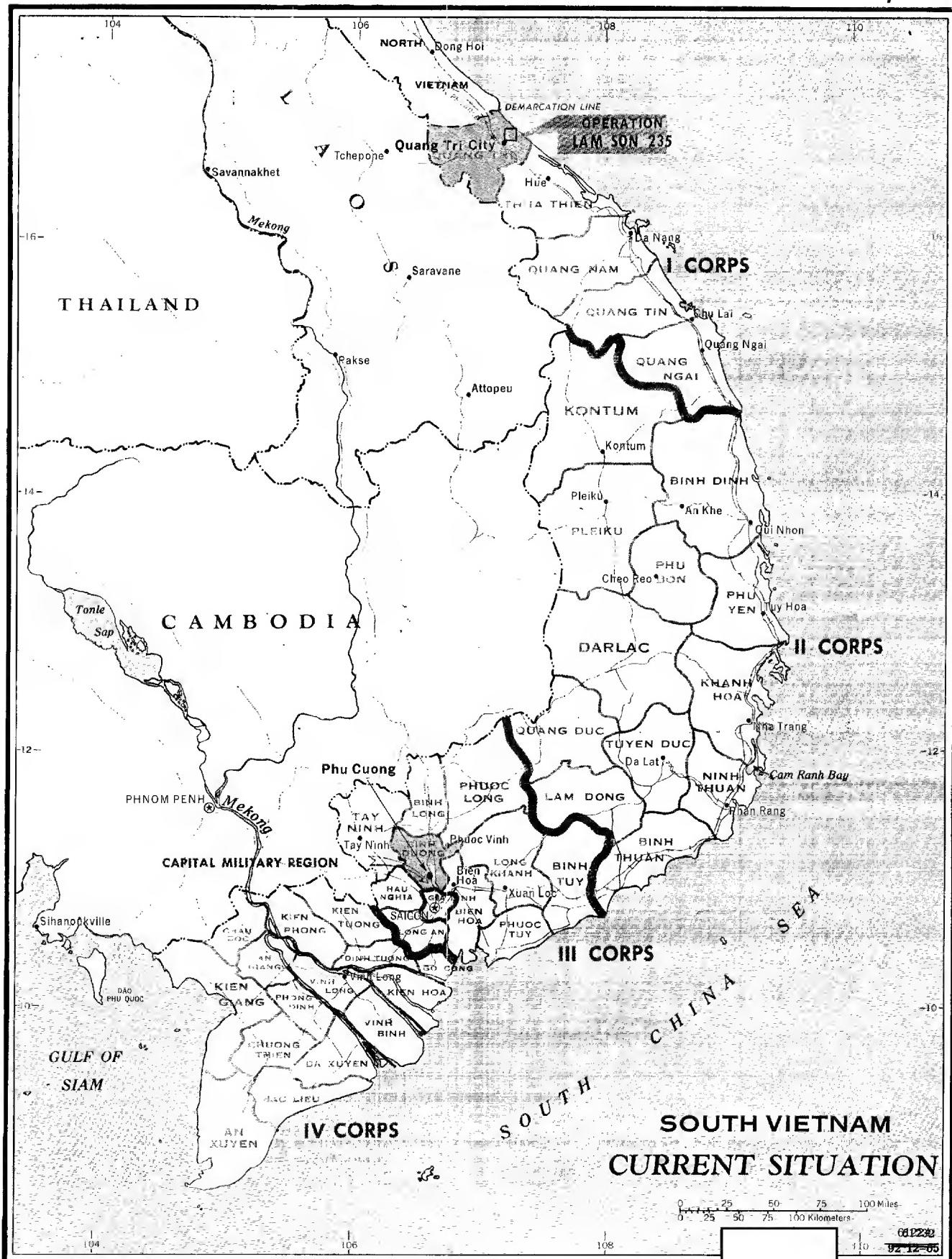
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*Vietnam: (Information as of 4:30 AM EST)

The Military Situation in South Vietnam: South Vietnamese troops conducting Operation LAM SON 235 several miles north of the provincial capital of Quang Tri established heavy contact with a Viet Cong force of estimated two-battalion strength late yesterday afternoon. Reinforcements and close air support were committed to the battle, which lasted four hours before contact was broken.

This operation has resulted in government casualties of 23 killed, 158 wounded, and five missing. Enemy losses totaled 242 killed and eight captured. Two of those captured claimed to be members of Viet Cong main force battalions which were recently assimilated into a new Viet Cong regiment.

Elsewhere yesterday, Viet Cong forces directed mortar fire on a South Vietnamese Army command post near Phu Cuong in Binh Duong Province, killing two and wounding 19 others. Viet Cong small arms and recoilless rifle fire also forced a small freighter of Panamanian registry to run aground in the Saigon River yesterday about 20 miles southeast of the capital. The freighter was able to free itself and proceed to Saigon under its own power. Six of the ship's personnel, including the captain, were injured during the incident.

On 26 February, a company of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade on patrol about 20 miles northeast of Saigon was heavily engaged by a Viet Cong force of unknown size for about two hours. US casualties during

the action were nine killed and 87 wounded, including the battalion commander. Viet Cong losses were unknown. The fighting was apparently at such close quarters that close air support may have caused some of the US casualties. US and Australian forces swept the area later with no further contact reported.

Political Developments in South Vietnam: The Ky government is apparently planning to hold provincial and municipal council elections this spring. Previously, government officials had been considering the alternative of extending for two years the terms of present council members, who were elected last May under the Quat government. Although the record of these councils has varied considerably depending upon the local situation and the individuals involved, the US Embassy feels that they have been more useful and responsible than originally expected. Moreover, the holding of local elections in the near future may abate, at least temporarily, popular demands for early national elections.

Communist Political Developments: The present lack of movement in Soviet policy and tactics on Vietnam was reflected once again during British Prime Minister Wilson's recent talks with Russian leaders in Moscow. The British got the distinct impression that the Soviet Union sees no door open for negotiations, and accordingly is unwilling to take any initiative in that direction. Although worried by the dangers latent in the intensifying conflict, the Soviet leaders evidently believe that for the time being any Russian move in favor of a negotiated settlement would be both ineffective and seriously detrimental to their own interests in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

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NOTES

Guatemala: [Communist-inspired violence is likely to follow the elections scheduled for 6 March.]

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[Communists and other extremist groups may go into the streets to fight, claiming that there has been fraud in the electoral process; their plans also include kidnaping of Guatemalan and US--especially military--officials. While the Guatemalan security forces are capable of handling limited trouble, they would be hard pressed to handle a situation involving large-scale terrorist activities.]

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Syria: Damascus remains calm after the violent military take-over on 23 February, and the regime will probably announce a new cabinet today. The northern command in Aleppo has apparently come over in support of the new military leaders in the capital, and there is no evidence as yet that any major military units are preparing a countermove. Infighting [has already developed] within the new Baath Party provisional leadership, however, and the situation remains highly unstable.]

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*Dominican Republic: [After some hesitation, Garcia Godoy has decided to go ahead with his agreement with the military on changing of the air force and army chiefs. Juan Bosch reportedly told Garcia Godoy's representatives on 26 February that he will severely criticize the President for not implementing the decree of 6 January assigning the outgoing service chiefs to overseas posts. At the same time, however, Bosch apparently indicated that he would not call a general strike over the issue. It remains to be seen whether the President will stick to his decision if strong leftist dissatisfaction develops.]

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